



Sarah Short and Emily Patel, owners of the Roasted Granola Cafe (©LisaCzech)

Arlington Small Business Guide



Prepared by: Department of Planning and Community Development

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Arlington Town Day, held every September

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This published 2024 guide is an updated revision from 2019. This guide is an updated version published in 2024. We want to thank the City of Medford for their Small Business Guide that served as inspiration for this.

Starting a Business in Arlington checklist

Please note, the information provided in this packet provides basic steps on how to open a business in Arlington and to give a broad overview of permitting and processes in the town of Arlington. Not every aspect will be applicable to you and your business.

Use this checklist to guide your progress.

- Choose a space that will fit your needs. Check the Zoning Bylaw to ensure that your intended use is allowed *prior to signing a lease agreement*.
- Apply for building, sign, plumbing, gas, and wiring permits through Inspectional Services
- Apply for a Certificate of Occupancy/Use with Inspectional Services (even if you are not doing any construction you will need this)

Are you serving food or drinks?

- Contact the Health Department to complete a Food Plan Review
- Once a Food Plan Review is completed, apply for the appropriate permits (i.e. Common Victullar, Food Vendor) with the Select Board

- Apply for a Business Certificate with the Town Clerk
- Reach out to the Economic Development Coordinator to be signed up to receive business community news and updates

a message from Jim Feeney, Town Manager

Whether you live, work, or play here, there is plenty to do in Arlington. With diverse cultural resources, a thriving arts scene, and a variety of locally owned retail shops and restaurants, Arlington is a destination that has something to offer everyone.

Located directly west of Cambridge, MA, Arlington's proximity to our region's world-renowned educational, medical, and innovation industries keeps us on the leading edge while retaining the scale and charm of a small town.

Arlington is a suburban hub of arts and culture, and our Revolutionary War history links us to neighboring Lexington, Concord, and Lincoln. Cultural assets like the Minuteman Bikeway, the Old Schwamb Mill, and the Arlington Cultural District reflect how the town and its residents value its historical, natural, and cultural resources.

The Town is committed to the success of our business community, and will continue to meet the needs of our local business owners representing the restaurant, retail, industrial, and technology sectors. We are driven by a customer service oriented approach to small business development, and we will continue to assist businesses looking to locate themselves here by making the permitting and licensing processes as easy as possible.

I hope that you find this packet to be a helpful resource for doing business in and with the town of Arlington.

Sincerely,



**Jim Feeney
Town Manager**

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The information provided in this packet provides basic steps on how to open a business in Arlington and to give a broad overview of permitting and processes in the town of Arlington. Not every aspect will be applicable to you and your business.

Before you sign a lease on an office, retail or commercial space review the zoning bylaws for allowable uses or contact the **Inspectional Services Department (ISD)** to ensure that your intended use is allowed for a particular space under the Town Zoning Bylaws. Zoning is a set of rules and regulations created by the town that describes what uses are and are not allowed. If you need to ask for relief from the Zoning Bylaws the Inspectional Services Department will help you apply for a special permit.

Make sure to confirm that your business is equipped with a business plan, a business structure, has the appropriate professional licenses and is prepared for your business tax obligations and responsibilities. You can consult the **Executive Office of Economic Development Small Business Guidance** to determine what is best for you and your business.

Arlington is also fortunate to have an active **chamber of commerce**. The [Arlington Chamber](#) offers opportunities for marketing, promotion, and networking. We encourage you to reach out and connect with the resources they have to offer.

What is...

Inspectional Services Division (ISD)?

This Division includes the town's Building, Electric, Plumbing, and Zoning Departments.

(781) 316-3390

inspectionalservices@town.arlington.ma.us

51 Grove Street, Arlington, MA 02476



Native Plants and Pollinators mural, 828 Massachusetts Avenue



Starting a business in Massachusetts

Learn about resources, funding opportunities, tax obligations, and the required steps for starting your business.

 [Mass.gov](#)

Interactive Link to the Executive Office of Economic Development Small Business Guidance website

How do people in Arlington spend most of their money?

\$118,841

Median Household Expenditure



\$16,864

Food + Beverages



\$25,952

Housing



\$20,955

Transportation



\$9,354

Healthcare

Low Commercial Tax Rates (FY23)

Below, Arlington's commercial tax rate (\$ for every \$1,000 per assessed value) compared to neighboring communities.

Lexington \$ 25.72

Boston \$ 24.68

Watertown \$ 19.73

Somerville \$ 17.35

Medford \$ 16.56

Cambridge \$ 11.23

Arlington \$ 11.21

Total Population: 45,779

Median Age of Residents: 41 yrs

27,374 people in the workforce

2.2% unemployment rate

Why Arlington?

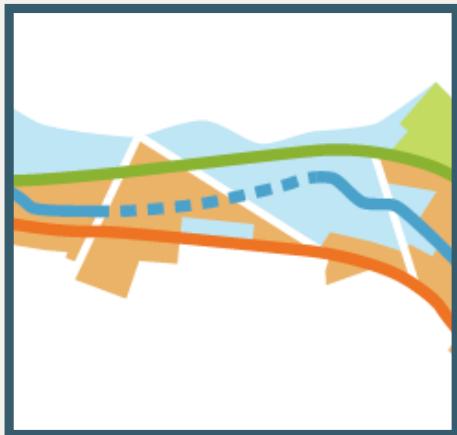
Unlike many other neighboring communities, Arlington maintains the same tax rate for both residential and commercial property.

FY 2023 Residential and Commercial Tax Rate: **\$11.21**

FY 2024 Residential and Commercial Tax Rate: **\$10.59**  **Decrease**

At just 5 sq. miles, Arlington is a dense community with three "Main Street" business districts: **Arlington Heights, Arlington Center, and East Arlington**. Down the street from world renown universities and the innovation hubs of Boston, Arlington provides an affordable option close to the action of the state's capital. As the starting point of the Minuteman Bikeway, Arlington is the perfect location for leisure cyclists or those looking to commute by bike into Cambridge, Somerville or Lexington. Take advantage of the close proximity to Cambridge and Somerville's incredible food, arts and culture scene which Arlington borders. On the other sides of Arlington are the towns of Winchester, Lexington, and Belmont. These towns rank among the highest in Massachusetts for per capita income.

ARLINGTON'S BUSINESS DISTRICTS



ARLINGTON HEIGHTS

Arlington Heights is at the western end of town. Skirted by the Minuteman Bikeway, the Heights has restaurants, cafes, pubs, specialty retailers and many family owned businesses. An active community association has poured their hearts and souls into making the Heights a beautiful and vibrant neighborhood.



ARLINGTON CENTER

Arlington Center is the town's central business district and the western portion of the Arlington Cultural District. With dozens of restaurants, retailers, two museums, the Regent Theatre and historic features, there is always something to do in the center. The neighborhood is at the heart of the Minuteman Bikeway and is home to both Arlington High School and Arlington Catholic High School.



EAST ARLINGTON

East Arlington is the eastern portion of the Arlington Cultural District. Home to the Capitol Theatre, several arts-focused retailers, excellent restaurants, galleries and the town's only hotel. With the Minuteman Bikeway running parallel to Mass Ave and surrounded by a dense residential neighborhood, it is accessible by car, bike, public transit, and on foot.

Choosing a location - is your intended use allowed?

Once you have found an appropriate retail, commercial, office or industrial space it is your responsibility to check that your intended use is allowed according to the Town Zoning Bylaw.

Understand that your business use is either:

- Permitted by right, which requires no zoning relief;
- Permitted through the grant of a Special Permit by the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) or Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) after demonstrating that certain specified conditions can be met; or
- Not allowed by the Zoning Bylaw. (Note that use variances are extremely rare; if your business use is not allowed in a particular zoning district, we recommend that you seek an alternative location in a district which does allow the use.)

Owners seeking to rent, purchase, or renovate an existing commercial space or build a new building should contact the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) or Economic Development early in their site selection process in order to determine whether their proposed business can be located as of right. If it is necessary to apply for a special permit or seek a variance, the prospective business owner should initiate the application at the earliest possible time, as the process can take several months.

Further information on the Town's Zoning Bylaw can be obtained by contacting DPCD or ISD or [viewing the Zoning Bylaw online.](#)

What is zoning? Why does it exist?

Zoning is a set of rules and regulations created by the town that describes what uses are and are not allowed. Is it a way for towns to control the type of development, preservation of open space and recreation, population density, and the intensity of different uses.

Application for Certificate of Occupancy/Use

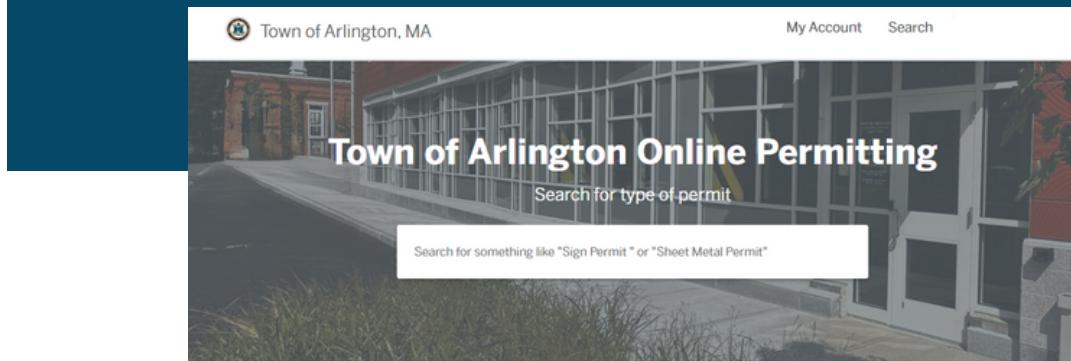
Apply for building, sign, plumbing, gas, and wiring permits through Inspectional Services. The Inspectional Services Department will refer you to DPCD if you need to obtain a Special Permit from the Arlington Redevelopment Board.

Even if you are not doing any construction you will still need to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy via the online permitting portal.

A Certificate of Occupancy is a document issued by our building department certifying a building's compliance with applicable building codes and to confirm that your desired use is allowed by our zoning bylaws. This is done for everyone's safety.

Are you completing any renovations?

Apply for permit(s) with the Inspectional Services Division (ISD). They issue Building, Plumbing, Gas, Electric, Dumpster/Pod and Sign permits. All ISD permits are now completed online at arlingtonma.portal.opengov.com.



CONTACT

Inspectional Services
51 Grove Street, Floor 1, Arlington, MA 02476
(781) 316-3390
inspectionalservices@town.arlington.ma.us

Serving Food at an Establishment

What food permits do I need?

Before you get started contact the Health Department to learn what approvals you will need to operate in Arlington. A full list of Health Department permits can be found at <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/departments/health-human-services/health-department/food>.

CONTACT

Health Compliance Office
27 Maple St, Arlington, MA 02476
(781) 316-3170
pmartin@town.arlington.ma.us

1. Food Plan Review (Health Department)

Any new establishment or an establishment with new ownership interested in storing, preparing, packaging, serving, vending, or otherwise providing food for human consumption is required to obtain a permit to operate a food establishment in the Town of Arlington. A plan review must be completed prior to the issuance of a food permit. This application must be completed by the applicant for any food establishment (retail, sit down, take out, etc.) - except the following: residential kitchens, mobile food vendors, temporary food permits.

No food is permitted in the establishment until the Office issues a Permit to Operate a Food Establishment. Permits to Operate a Food Establishment expire on December 31st of each year.

2. Obtain a Common Victualler or Food Vendor License (Select Board)

Apply for Common Victualler & Food Vendor license, and optional alcohol through the Select Board. More information is available at <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/boards-and-committees/select-board/license-permits>.

CONTACT

Select Board Office
730 Mass Ave. Arlington, MA 02476
(781) 316-3020
sbadmin@town.arlington.ma.us

Serving Food at an Establishment continued

2. Obtain a Common Victualler or Food Vendor License (Select Board) - continued

Applications will be reviewed by a variety of town departments and then brought before the Select Board as a hearing at their next available meeting. Attendance at this meeting is mandatory and will be schedule 4-6 weeks out from your application submittal. *This occurs after you have obtained your Food Permit from the Board of Health and Certificate of Occupancy from the Inspectional Services Department.*

Town Liquor Licenses Available (as of 10/1/23)

Type of Restaurant	Total Allowed	Total in Town	Available	Requirement
All Alcohol Restaurants	20	13	7	50 seat min.
Wine and Malt Restaurants	Unlimited	15		19 seat min.
Theatre	Unlimited	2		100 seat min.
Package Store	7	6	1	n/a
Club	Unlimited	7		n/a

3. Do you want to have outdoor dining?

Apply for an Outdoor Restaurant and Retail Permit Application if you would like to place and maintain outdoor seating or a retail installation on the public right of way (i.e. sidewalk, parking space). These are approved annually through the office of the Select Board. This is typically done in the spring. Outdoor dining runs from April 15 - November 15. More information is available on the Select Board website.

Obtain a Business Certificate

What is a business certificate?

Business Certificates (commonly known as "doing business as" or "DBA" certificates) are filed with the Town Clerk so consumers can identify and locate the owner of a business that goes by a name other than the name of the owner.

How do I apply for one?

To apply, complete the application and email it to TownClerk@town.arlington.ma.us or come in person and we will assist you. Please read the application carefully to determine if additional documents are required to complete the process of registering your business in Arlington.

Who needs a Business Certificate?

A Business Certificate must be filed with the Town Clerk for:

1. Corporation doing business under a name other than their exact legal name
2. Sole proprietorships and partnerships doing business under a name that does not include surname of partner or proprietor
3. Limited partnerships doing business under a name other than its true partnership name or a name which does not contain the words "Limited Partnership"
4. Limited Liability Companies doing business under a name other than their exact legal name

Besides or in addition to the legal obligations, a significant amount of banks require a DBA regardless.

How long is a Business Certificate valid for?

A Business Certificate is valid for four (4) years. Applicants must sign in person at the Town Clerk's office with valid photo ID. All owners of the business must be present to sign or arrangements must be made to have documents notarized.

Town Clerk

730 Mass Ave. Arlington, MA 02476

townclerk@town.arlington.ma.us

781-316-3072

CONTACT

Permit and License List*

ALL BUSINESSES WILL NEED

Business Certificate | Town Clerk

Certificate of Occupancy/Use | Inspectional Services Division

Sign Permit | Inspectional Services Division

BUSINESSES COMPLETING RENOVATIONS

Building, Plumbing, Electrical, Gas & Dumpster/Pod Permits | Inspectional Services Division

FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS & BUSINESSES

Plan Review, Permit to Operate a Food Establishment | Health Department

Permit/License (Food Vendor, Common Victualler, Wine & Malt Beverage Only Restaurants, All Alcohol Restaurant, All Alcohol Club, All Alcohol Package Store Theatre License) | Select Board



*This is a non-exhaustive list of the possible permits/licenses you may need to operate a business in Arlington. Not all will be applicable to your business. Additional permits/licenses may also be needed.

Other Permits and Licenses You May Need

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Regulations	Application
Medical Marijuana	Regulation Restricting the Sale of Medical Marijuana
Adult Use Marijuana (Recreational)	Regulations to Ensure the Sanitary and Safe Operation of Adult-Use Marijuana Establishments & the Sale of Adult-Use Marijuana
Body Art(Tattoo/Body Piercing)	Body Art Regulations
Tanning	Tanning Regulations 105 CMR 123.00
Body Work	Body Work Rules and Regulations
BioTech	BioTech Regulations
Massage	Board of Registration of Massage Therapy
Camps	State Camp Regulations
Demolition	Local requirements only
Dumpster	Dumpster Regulations
Bathing Beach	State Bathing Beach Regulations
Pools	State Pool Regulations
Removal of Exterior Paint	Removal of Exterior Paint Regulations
Tobacco Control	Regulations Restricting Sale of Tobacco and Nicotine
	Workplace and Public Smoking Regulations
Food	Food Regulations
Housing	Housing Regulations
Sealer of Weights & Measures	Weights & Measures Regulations

SELECT BOARD

Lodging Houses / Inn Keeper

All Alcohol Club

Second Hand Dealer

All Alcohol Package Store

Public Entertainment

Theatre License

Automatic Amusement

Hackney Carriage

Food Vendor

Sidewalk Cafe

Common Victualler

Wine & Malt Beverage Only Restaurants

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All Alcohol Restaurant

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information



Town of Arlington, Economic Development

The Economic Development Coordinator works out of the Planning and Community Development Department. The Coordinator helps recruit and retain businesses to increase the commercial and industrial tax base and works with multiple stakeholders to maintain economically vibrant business districts and support the arts community.

CONTACT

Katie Luczai, Economic Development Coordinator
730 Mass Ave. Annex, Arlington, MA 02476
kluczai@town.arlington.ma.us
781-316-3095



The Arlington Chamber of Commerce is a non-profit organization with a volunteer board of directors and more than 250 dues paying members. Our membership is comprised of a wide variety of businesses, community members, entrepreneurs, nonprofit groups and home-based workers. The Chamber is dedicated to fostering a strong economic climate in Arlington and advancing the desirability of Arlington as a place to shop, work, live and visit and promoting and supporting member businesses through advocacy, marketing, and outreach.

CONTACT

Arlington Chamber of Commerce
611 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA 02474
781-643-4600
info@arlcc.org

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information



Parking

Arlington is a densely populated municipality and it is important for residents and visitors to understand its parking laws and regulations. All meters are effective Mon-Sat from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and accept credit cards with a \$1.00 minimum.

Monthly Parking Passes are available for the Town's two municipal parking lots. They cost \$50 per month and are valid for 3 months at a time. The application can be found online and submitted to the Treasurer's Office.



Looking to make good use of the Minuteman Bike Path or our system of bike lanes? Then also be sure to check out [**Arlington's Bicycle Parking Guidelines!**](#)

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information



Arlington's Commercial Orange Bag Program for Small Business Recycling and Trash

What is this?

This is a Pay-As-You-Throw program, so you pay for the amount of trash you create. The cost is \$2.30 per 32 gallon bag, and sold in rolls of 10 bags for \$23.00. All trash must be inside the orange bags at the curb. Orange bags can be put out at the curb between 6-7 AM on the day of your collection. Recycling collection is included with this program.

How can I sign up?

Call Recycling Coordinator, Charlotte Milan to find out if your business is eligible for this program, 781-316-3108. Once registered, businesses may purchase commercial orange bags at Shattuck Ace Hardware stores. Refer to Massachusetts Waste Disposal Ban laws for prohibited trash items. Keeping recyclable materials out of the trash is required of all residents and businesses, per state law. Therefore, at this time there is no charge for recycling when it is placed, correctly, next to commercial orange bags. Use a blue reusable container to hold your recycling, and help prevent litter in our community by using a larger enough container to hold your recycling on windy days.

Compost

Check our Feed FiDO, our free drop off pilot program. FiDO has two publicly accessible locations. FiDO (which stands for Food scrap Drop Off) accepts only vegetarian food scraps—please do not include animal products.

Alternatively, three private companies are permitted to haul food scraps in Town: Black Earth Compost, Bootstrap Compost, and City Compost.

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information



MassSave - Electrify your business!

Becoming a greener business can both attract customers and reduce your energy bills.

Mass Save offers businesses and not-for-profit organizations many different kinds of technical assistance and financial incentives – including performance optimization for your existing systems, weatherization, HVAC systems, water heating, pipe insulation, commercial refrigeration, variable speed motors, pumps, demand management, help with new construction and major renovations, plus a variety of industry-specific solutions for groceries, restaurants, office, retail outlets, and more. Learn more about [Mass Save's business offerings](#) here.

Start by requesting an [energy assessment](#) that is suitable to your business or organization.



Want to tell your customers and community that you are using clean electricity?

Opt up to 100% renewable electricity through Arlington Community Electricity.

Other Town Utilities

Gas	National Grid	1-800-233-5325
Electricity	Eversource	1-800-592-2000
Cable Television/Phone Service.....	Xfinity (Comcast)	1-888-633-4266
	Astound (formerly RCN)	1-800-427-8626
	Verizon	1-800-837-4966
Streetlights.....	Arlington Dept. of Public Works	1-781-316-3320
Water/Sewer.....	Arlington Water Sewer Division	1-781-316-3100

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information

U.S. Small Business Administration



The SBA provides a comprehensive guide to the legal and financial steps you need to take to launch your business.

<https://www.sba.gov/business-guide/launch-your-business>



Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network

Provides free and confidential business advising, technical assistance and low-cost training programs to prospective and existing small businesses throughout the Commonwealth.

Areas of assistance include, but are not limited to:

- Start-up Businesses
- Business Plan Development
- Financial Plan Development
- Marketing and Sales Strategies
- Cash Flow Analysis
- Organizational and Personnel Issues
- Government Procurement Assistance

www.msbdc.org/

MassDevelopment



MassDevelopment's bond financing programs offer a cost-effective way for companies to finance capital projects, new equipment purchases, and facility expansions. We also provide loans and guarantees to help grow your operations, and development assistance for early-stage projects.

www.massdevelopment.com

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information



Center for Women and Enterprise - Eastern Massachusetts

The Center for Women & Enterprise (CWE) is a non-profit economic empowerment organization whose mission is to strengthen communities and the economy by supporting women to launch and successfully sustain businesses. Opened in 1995, the Eastern Massachusetts Women's Business Center operates in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration. We offer consultations, workshops and networking opportunities to help you reach your entrepreneurial goals



Info.EasternMA@CWEonline.org

<https://www.cweonline.org/About-CWE/CWE-Eastern-Massachusetts>

Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation

MGCC drives inclusive economic growth through access to alternative funding, resources, and individualized services to identify and structure solutions tailored to each small business in Massachusetts.



Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation

They offer:

- Small Business Lending
- Microloans
- Small Business Technical Assistance Grant Program
- CDFI & CDC Capital Match Grant Program
- Biz-M-Power Grant Program (2:1 Crowdfunding Grant program)



617.523.6262

<https://www.empoweringsmallbusiness.org/>

Resources for Businesses and Other Helpful Information

Community Teamwork - Entrepreneurship Center



Greater Lowell's Community Action Agency, we mobilize resources for low-income people, providing opportunities for them to achieve stability, self-sufficiency and have an active voice and participation in the decisions that affect their lives.

Access to Capital - SBA Microloan: Offers up to \$50,000 with favorable terms and reduced rates after coaching.

Business Support: Help with business plans, bookkeeping guidance, marketing strategies, and website development feedback.

Coaching Referrals: We connect you with consultants for comprehensive services.

Grant Support: Assistance with grant applications.

Access to Lowell Makes: Access to our Digital Media & Printing Studio and Marketing Coaching, free for our clients.

2,099 Small businesses received 3,846 hours of technical assistance support from the Entrepreneurship Center



978-654-5731

<https://www.commteam.org/entrepreneurship-center-business-assistance/>